

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

AUGUST 14, 2012

**Support AB 828: Nutrition Assistance for Families in Recovery Act**

Individuals convicted of felony offenses and who have paid their debt to society by successfully serving their sentences should not be “criminalized” indefinitely. They should be afforded the opportunity to abide by the law, pursue their dreams, attain self-sufficiency and apply for public services for which they would otherwise be eligible, such as food assistance. In those circumstances where access to public assistance would support children, strengthen families, and reinforce participation in job training, mental health counseling or behavioral health programs, reasonable limitations on access to services may be appropriate, especially if they promote successful re-entry into the community as law abiding citizens and/or self-sufficiency.

Current California policies limit or restrict people with felony convictions from receiving public services such as food and housing assistance. These policies consign many individuals who have paid their debt to society by successfully completing their sentences to lifetime prohibitions on access to the supportive services that could

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facilitate re-integration into society and self-sufficiency. For example, prior to 2006, many professional state licensing boards, such as the Board of Barbering and Cosmetology, severely limited the ability of ex-offenders convicted of felony offenses from obtaining licenses, and, thus, hindered them from gaining self-sufficiency by pursuing a vocation that may have no connection to the offense for which they were convicted. Unfortunately, the effect of such laws, regulations, and policies on people with criminal records is currently unknown to policy-makers and may contribute to their alarmingly high rates of impoverishment, unemployment and recidivism.

Current state law prohibits applicants for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits from qualifying, if they have been convicted of a drug felony; although the federal government gives states the flexibility to opt out of this disqualification in whole or part. Presently, thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia have already restored nutrition benefits to this vulnerable population.

Assembly Bill 828, the Nutrition Assistance for Families in Recovery Act, authored by Assembly Member Sandre Swanson, would allow individuals convicted of a drug felony to have access to food stamps. Applicants convicted of a drug felony must provide evidence of participation, completion or enrollment of a government approved drug treatment program in order to receive benefits. Lifting these restrictions will provide children of parolees with nutritional support while providing organizations and communities working with the parolee population with another tool to ensure successful

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reentry for an increasing number of people. Denying food stamps to individuals will hamper their ability to become self-sufficient and become productive citizens, and provide and care for their children. Those making a sincere effort to re-integrate into the community should be assisted so that they may have a chance of succeeding.

**I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:**

1. Direct the Los Angeles County's legislative advocates in Washington, D.C. and Sacramento to support legislation that eliminates lifetime prohibitions on access to job training, human services and voting rights for those who have been convicted of felony offenses and have successfully served court-ordered sentences, and are making a sincere effort to re-integrate into the community.
2. Direct the County's federal and state legislative advocates to support efforts to identify the laws, regulations, and policies that may create unnecessary barriers to employing people with criminal records.
3. Send a letter to the Los Angeles County's state legislative delegation, recommending support for measures such as Assembly Bill 828, the Nutrition Assistance for Families in Recovery Act.

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